



Connecticut Association of Centers for Independent Living
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*...Working for the full integration, independence, and civil rights of people with disabilities
through Centers for Independent Living*

**Testimony of Candace Low, Chair
before the Human Services Sub-Committee of the Appropriations
Committee
February 18, 2009**

Center for Disability Rights
764A Campbell Ave.
West Haven, CT 06516
V 203-934-7077
TDD 203-934-7079

Disabilities Network of
Eastern CT
238 West Town Street
Norwich, CT 06360
V/TDD 860-823-1898

Disability Resource Center
of Fairfield County
80 Ferry Boulevard
Suite 210
Stratford, CT 06497
V 203-378-6977
TDD 203-378-3248

Independence Northwest
1183 New Haven Rd.
Naugatuck, CT 06770
V 203-729-3299
TDD 203-729-1281

Independence Unlimited
Suite D
151 New Park Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106
V/TDD 860-523-5021

***H. B. No. 6365 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2011, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS
THEREFOR.***

Good afternoon. My name is Candace Low and I am Executive Director of Independence Unlimited, a center for independent living located in Hartford. I am also chair of the Connecticut Association of Centers for Independent Living and representing the five CT centers. I would like to recognize my colleagues from the other centers located in West Haven, Naugatuck, Norwich and Stratford.

I am here this afternoon to ask that you put the centers for independent living back into the state budget for core services that include advocacy (individual and systems), peer counseling, skills training and information and referral. When the budget was written, it was presumed that the new federal stimulus bill would replace the state dollars. Now the federal stimulus bill is an injection of funds that will require the centers to provide new services to create jobs, not provide core services. Centers for independent living have a state mandate to provide core services but without state dollars that ability will be comprised at a time when people with disabilities will need the help of the centers for independent living the most.

The centers are involved in many activities that help save the state money. We transition people with disabilities from nursing homes into community based settings (Money Follows the Person Program) and prevent premature entry into nursing facilities by provide support services that allow people with disabilities to remain in the community. It would cost the state millions to house all the people with disabilities in nursing homes that we support so they live in the community and become taxpayers.

State support of the centers for independent living support the independent living philosophy so people with disabilities can enjoy the same civil rights as other people. State support of the centers for independent living is giving people with disabilities the freedom to live independently and become independent of the system. State support of the centers for independent living is investing in people; it is the right thing to do.

Thank you for your time.



AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

Edward F. Peltier, Executive Director

January 29, 2009

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of Independence Unlimited, Inc. (IUI), the Greater Hartford Independent Living Center for persons with disabilities.

The graduates of our school utilize and benefit from the services of Independence Unlimited in a variety of ways. The IUI services help our graduates maintain employment and receive needed state services that, if not provided, will only result in higher costs to state government. Deaf adults may be able to secure employment but, often need assistance in arranging subsidized housing, transportation and basic support like budgeting. Connecticut Bureau of Rehabilitation Services provides the employment support on the job, but does not address these other needs. When these needs are not met, the employment situation often "goes south" resulting in increased state support and a potential chronic underclass of persons not employed. IUI also provides support to our students as they transition to community living and employment. They face the same needs as mentioned above.

Continued level funding at IUI is an economic engine for the state. It supports people who can find and maintain employment and remain healthier and more engaged in their community. Please consider the continued funding of this important program. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Edward F. Peltier
Executive Director
860-570-2304

22 Pine Grove Road
Southington, CT 06489-1462

Ms. Candace Low – Executive Director
Independence Unlimited
161 New Park Ave
Suite 'D'
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Thank you

To whom it may concern:

My wife Anne and I would like to extend Thank You to your agency for making our lives safer and happier over the last many months.

Sue Salters has been there for us, many times with just a shoulder to complain on but always been there at the ready to find resources to help our many needs.

In the Summer of 2007 our main house air conditioner stopped working and we couldn't afford a new one due to many medical bills and conditions especially since I had been out of work almost 9 months at the time on medical leave while awaiting my first Social Security disability check.

After thoroughly researching models available Part B funds were released to buy and install the air conditioner.

Currently Sue is working with us to find affordable accessible housing as John is now permanently disabled and in a power wheelchair, which does not fit in the house except very limitedly.

Sue has recently secured Part B funding for an application fee for an accessible apartment we are applying for right now. She is helping us weave through the CT DSS housing division for a RAP housing exception.

Note, last year Sue's resourcefulness led to the building of a ramp with less than a weeks notice of John's being released from a nursing home in November 2007.

In closing, at this time of economic strife its programs such as this one at Independence Unlimited that need to be funded to help the people who need their help to stay off the edge and active in the community, independently, as opposed to being in an institutional setting (hospital, nursing facility or community workshop). Everyone's independence and

inclusion in the community is obviously less expensive in the long run for the community as a whole.

Independence Unlimited and people like Sue Salters make that mission happen every day with proper funding.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

John M. West
Anne M. West
22 Pine Grove Road
Southington, CT 06489-1462
860-628-6454 v/f

cc: file
Sue Salters

Paula J. Pesapane
38 Dove Lane
Middletown, CT 06457
Phone: (860) 613-0835

To Whom It May Concern,

The easiest way to start this letter is to tell you the truth. Independence Unlimited saved my life. In 2004 I was a forty year old woman who had just been told that I would never be able to walk again and that considering my age and disabilities I would most likely spend the majority, if not all, of the rest of my life in Nursing Homes. Not because of my disabilities but because it was next to impossible to help someone of my age find housing in the great State of Connecticut.

Being of that age, and after finding out what my prognosis was, naturally this threw me into a tailspin of depression and I felt I would never recover from this blow. The Nursing Home that I was residing in at the time had an average resident age of 70. Huge difference for someone that was supposed to be in the prime of my life. There wasn't anyone of my generation in residence that I could talk to or even relate to and unfortunately for me the Nursing Home had a very stringent policy stating that staff was not to be too chummy with the residents, even ones closer to their age. I truly felt alone.

After wallowing in self pity for a few months my never say die personality kicked in and I vowed I wasn't going to spend the rest of my life in a place like that without giving it my all to get out. I spent months dissecting local newspapers and researching online for apartments that would be suitable for me without any success. All I kept hearing was that while it was a shame that I was disabled, the programs and facilities that were in place for the disabled had an age requirement of 50-52 and older and that seniors came first. I was told time and again by these places that ten to twelve years wasn't a long time for me to wait and that I could apply when I was older. Easy for them to say, they weren't the ones living my life and experiencing the horrors of living with the inevitable death toll that occurs almost daily in places like that.

I was fortunate to be introduced to someone that worked for Independence Unlimited and from the beginning I started to see a small pinpoint of hope that I would again be able to live a normal life. I applied for assistance from the program and waited a few months before I was accepted and then waited another few months again before I was assigned to my caseworker Claudia Keeley.

Upon meeting Ms. Keeley she informed me about Section 8 housing and she also explained that while that program had basically lost funding for new people, there was another program RAP (Rental Assistance Program) that I could apply for and that I had to be willing to write letters, go on interviews and whatever else it took in order for me to find a place to live. If I was lucky enough to be accepted to this program, it wasn't going to be an automatic guarantee that I would find housing because not everyone was willing to rent to someone in my category.

After being accepted for RAP, I applied for every Senior/Disabled Housing group from Old Saybrook to Avon and was put on a waiting list for almost all of these towns and the ones

surrounding them. I was told for almost all of them that the average wait again was in some cases was ten years. Here we go again! I was reminded that with RAP I could go apply to mainstream apartment complexes, condos and/or homes that were either handicap accessible or the program could get funding for some modifications to residences in order for me to reside there safely.

In early 2006 circumstances unforeseen to my family, had my brother who is also disabled in need to apply for help as well and Ms. Keeley was able to have my brother added to my RAP certificate.

It took until April 2006 before we were finally able to find an apartment complex willing to take someone with RAP, but they could not make any modifications to their apartments for me. While the apartment itself was great for me, I wasn't able to gain entrance into the buildings without standing and climbing a curb. I was able to do this, but it was very hard for me to have to do this all the time and it hindered me from doing things that would have me outside of my home engaging in other activities. With the help of Independence Unlimited I was able to get a grant that helped pay for a curb cut and ramp to be installed in front of my new apartment building. Independence Unlimited also helped me obtain money for my security deposit and donated used furniture and some other necessary things needed to start my new life, including gift cards to local grocery stores to help us stock up on food.

Without the help of Independence Unlimited I would still be in a Nursing Home trying to fit in and hoping I would die. My brother would also be residing in one as well, even though he is healthy enough to live on his own. While Nursing Homes have their place in our society, they are not meant to house people that are able to take care of themselves, with either little or no help from the medical profession. It is far cheaper and cost effective to have agencies such as Independence Unlimited aiding people like myself get on with our lives than it is to keep us institutionalized until we are of an age when we can apply for senior or disabled housing which is virtually impossible to obtain.

My brother and I have been living in our new apartment since June of 2006 and we are both happy and adjusted in our new environment. I believe from the bottom of my heart this would never have been possible without the aid of agencies like Independence Unlimited. Cutting the funding for Independence Unlimited is a travesty. They not only help people like myself gain our freedom by helping us become deinstitutionalized, they help keep others from becoming institutionalized by providing programs and education that teach others how they can successfully live in the community and where to turn if they need help in any way.

Would you want one of your loved ones that has a disability and is not of the normal age for a Nursing Home residing in one for the rest of their lives because there isn't an agency available to advocate for them? I would hope the answer would be no.

Sincerely,

Paula J. Pesapane

DEAR CANDACE :

INDEPENDENCE UNLIMITED HAS
HELPED STEP BY STEP TO LIVE
IN THE COMMUNITY. AND ALSO
HELPED ME TO GET MY
CERTIFICATE

Rodney Johnson

To whom it may concern:

I am a resident in a nursing home in the city of Hartford, Ct. I am actively looking my best opportunity to return to live in the community independently. The meetings and my participation at this independent living center provide me a great deal of instruments I will need at the moment of my transition (before and after).

Here I receive guidance, orientation and inspiration to reach my goals. This alone can give you a good idea of the importance and need this center is for me and many others in my situation. We all hope and expect that you can understand and be instrumental in the policy of generously funding our loved center. Thanks for your cooperation.

Victor H. Gonzalez
Park Place Health Center
5 Greenwood street, Hartford, Ct.

For whom this may concern, I am a resident of a Nursing Home, and have lived there for five years. But in the last three years I was fortunate to be introduced to Independence Unlimited. I have a T.B.I injury which I received thirteen years ago! And due to my injury I was required to live at a Nursing Home. But I was introduced to the Coordinator at that time Mrs. Claudia Keeley who informed me this program that in time would assist me in ~~getting~~ ~~trans~~ moving back into the community. and out of the Nursing Home! They have been very kind and understanding. With their loving kindness and patience and devotion, you feel and think positive thought. Thank you for listening Steven C. Hamlet Park Place CTR.

I must include something else. We have a new Coordinator, Mr. Dom Denigris has showed me, that we can't quit things, ~~Look Bad~~ when things look bad! He has stayed with us strongly and enforced the belief that we can succeed in moving from a Nursing Home and into the Community and be happy. And making room for the people that can use spaces and the skills of a Nursing home.

01-22-09

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I, WILLIAM F. CASEY, JR., AM PETITIONING THE STATE LEGISLATURE TO CONTINUE FUNDING THE INDEPENDENCE UNLIMITED, INC. PROGRAM AS A MEANS TO RE-ENTER THE COMMUNITY AND TRANSITION OUT OF THE CHELSEA HEALTH CARE FACILITY LOCATED AT 25 LORRAINE ST. WHERE I HAVE BEEN A RESIDENT FOR THE LAST TWO AND ONE HALF YEARS.

IND. UNLIMITED HAS HELPED ME TO RE-MEMBER AND IMPROVE MY LIVING STANDARDS AND I FEEL DEEPLY INDEBTED FOR ALL THE SERVICES IT HAS PROVIDED. I WOULD GREATLY MISS ITS' PROGRAM. CANDACE AND HER STAFF ARE HIGHLY APPROPRIATE FOR THIS POSITION. PLEASE TAKE THIS AS A VERY SERIOUS REQUEST.

SINCERELY,
William F. Casey Jr.

Dear Candace,

My name is Charles Fernigan
and without this program I would
be kept in a nursing home for the
rest of my life. This program helps the
handicapped get back living in the
community. Without this program I
would be lost in this world.
Thank you for Independence Unlimited
for having this program

Charles W. Fernigan

To whom it may concern:
I think that this program is very
important and it is necessary to
keep it open to help peoples to learn
how to live in the community
theres a lot of good thing that
being taught here, please keep it
going for our sake an thank
you.

Raymond Foster

Dear Candace,

I wish everything that you've done for me I'm still working on my steps everything is good I wish I had more to speak about I'd like to thank you from the bottom of my heart I'd like to thank Claudia, Loretta, and I like coming up here to share my story with everybody else. I wish everybody would get together and speak about themselves in support of I.U. And from the bottom of my heart I'd like to thank you all for being there for me.

Jane Concepcion

Dear Candace,

As I think about what my future would have meant without Peer Support Group, my father would not have come as far in my understanding of my disability without my mother. Without the circle of support that IU provides, I don't think I would have come this far today. It has been crucial to helping me overcome many problems in my life.

COURTNEY LAMON

To whom it may concern

I Deborah W. is a patient at a nursing home by coming to I.M.H. it has help me be more independent. I learn a lot about living on my own. I.M.H. is the best program for me, I also learn how to be open when it come to opening up.

Deborah Williams

1.12.09

Too Whom it May Concern

Coming to Independance unlimited is very important to me coming to it, I have at chelse Place, if I didnt come here, I would never leave the nursing home, I'm more then ready to leave the facility, by coming to Independance unlimited, its getting me closer to moving out, I need to be here its teaching me alot how to live back out in the community,

Please stay open for all of us

The supper that I need to get throw this
transinche I Been In A Nursing Home for 4 years
I finely ~~find~~ found a support group, ~~and~~

Chris Klimovich

DEAR CANDACE :

I WAS IN THE NURSING HOME
ABOUT 1 YEAR AND 3 MONTHS.
THEN I KNEW ABOUT INDEPENDENCE
UNLIMITED, THEN CLAUDIA HELPED
ME TO TRANSFER OUTSIDE TO
AN APARTMENT. NOW I LIVE IN
MY OWN APARTMENT, AND THEY
ALSO HELPED ME GET MY
CNAS.

Israël Cordova

To Candace

I find it very helpfull coming here to Independence Unlimited for the reason it helps me to understand my rights as a handicapped person. I didn't know about my rights until I came here. This is very important for me while I look for a place to live and in dealing with a landlord.

I'm a resident at a nursing home at Trinity Hill Care Center. I've been there for 5 1/2 years and I thought I could never leave. But by coming to Independence Unlimited I can see with the help of the people here I can, by using the proper channels.

We learned about the various programs that assist handicapped individuals and how to go about using them. Every week we have group discussions on things that really matter when it comes to returning to the community such as Health benifits, Rent assistance, access to counselors and individuals that will provide a caring relationship with ~~us~~ **us**.

Independence Unlimited gives me a chance to socialize with other people that are like me and striving for the same goals, its a very caring environment and I look forward every Thursday in coming here.

Please consider your decision on our funding here and understand that there are people that really depend on Independence Unlimited.

John Canfield